

It isn't just Gamergate anymore: Social Justice Warriors (SJWs) have an Important Choice to Make

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Social Justice Warriors (SJWs) are one of the most influential cultural and political groups at the moment. Since their emergence in the Gamergate controversy at the last turn of decade, they have been instrumental in pushing forward various movements, including the emerging Fourth Wave of feminism, Black Lives Matter, as well as many LGBTI rights movements. Meanwhile, SJWs are also increasingly the subject of backlash from all quarters of society. Anti-SJW videos have become a big genre on YouTube, with a million views being not uncommon for the most popular talking heads in that genre. Anti-SJW political memes are also commonly encountered on social media.

Are SJWs Anti-Freedom?

The main complaint about SJWs is that they are against freedom. It appears that, while a few anti-SJWs may genuinely be opposed to social justice, the vast majority are simply opposed to what they see is illiberal behaviour from SJWs. Many believe that, by 'trolling' SJWs, they can register their protest and hopefully change things. Meanwhile, SJWs generally don't believe they are involved in illiberal behaviour.

So, have SJWs been involved in illiberal behaviour? Let's look at the evidence. There's safe speech: that's plain illiberal, no ifs, ands or buts. I mean, practising safe speech in a designated private meeting may be okay, but getting society at large to practice safe speech is nothing short of oppression. There's no-platforming: again, clearly illiberal, since freedom of speech is perhaps the first rule of liberalism. There's the Oppression Olympics and the so-called progressive stack. That's again clearly illiberal, because human beings are being judged by their group affiliations rather than their individual merit. Finally, there's the radical identity politics, where people are divided into the oppressors and the oppressed. That's not really compatible with liberty, equality and fraternity, right?

The evidence is in. Unfortunately, certain SJW behaviours have been quite illiberal. The Anti-SJWs do have a point here. Unlike most anti-SJWs, however, I actually sort of admire SJWs. I think most of them have their heart in the right place. Let me explain.

Firstly, it's not a bad thing to be passionate. If nobody was ever passionate, we wouldn't have things like liberal democracy, the end of slavery, universal suffrage, gender equality and gay equality, to name a few important historical developments. We shouldn't hate passion. However, we should definitely be on the lookout for passion being channeled into hateful or destructive courses. After

all, passion also gave us Robespierre and the Jacobins. From what I can see, SJW passion is being increasingly misguided.

Secondly, most SJWs are not anti-freedom at heart. They probably don't care enough about freedom, but that's just because they don't know why it is so important. Rather, SJWs are passionate about equality and social justice, and are perhaps too impatient to get it. This leaves them open to the influence of neo-Marxist ideas, which promise them a shortcut to a utopia with equality for all, if they 'struggle against oppression' with ferocity. Moreover, their impatience also leads them to believe the neo-Marxist lie that liberal democracies are ineffective and our system is somehow 'inherently oppressive'.

What is Neo-Marxism, Anyway?

What is the neo-Marxist influence I'm talking about? Well, recently whenever I talk about neo-Marxism, Jordan Peterson almost always comes up in the conversation. However, neo-Marxism has nothing to do with Peterson, except for the fact that he is very aware of it. And forget whatever Peterson has told you about neo-Marxism. His theory about Foucault and Derrida and French postmodernism is merely a distraction, in my opinion.

Basically, neo-Marxism is an extended application of the theories of Karl Marx into non-economic areas, something that Marx himself would likely have opposed. Whereas Marxism was about the 'struggle' between workers (the proletariat) and bosses (the bourgeois), neo-Marxism has generalised this to struggles between any oppressed group and their supposed oppressors. Neo-Marxism, thus, is a generalised form of what Marxism calls 'dialectical struggle': people divided into two opposing categories, with struggle being inevitable between them. The neo-Marxist worldview therefore pits women against men, non-whites against whites, queer people against straight people, and so on. They propose that if the oppressed do not develop a group consciousness of being oppressed (analogous to class consciousness in classical Marxism) and hence struggle as a group against their oppressors (analogous to class struggle in classical Marxism), they will keep getting oppressed. Obviously, there is no place for the individualist notion of liberty and the equal dignity of human beings in such a worldview. Not when some people are effectively seen as the equivalent of 'class enemies'.

In my opinion, a lot of the misguided things SJWs are doing have been encouraged by neo-Marxist thinking. The struggles over acceptable speech, historical monuments, national days of celebration, and the division of people into categories of oppression all contribute to an increased and broadened sense of struggle in society. Bad for society, bad for social justice (because it entrenches existing attitudes), but good from a neo-Marxist point of view (because we get closer to 'overthrowing' the system, whatever that means).

I trust that most SJWs sincerely want Social Justice. But they need to think critically.

Most SJWs are not neo-Marxists. Most of them aren't even familiar with Marxist theory at all. In fact, the problem with SJWs is that they don't think critically enough, about the source of the ideas they receive, and what agenda those ideas serve. Maybe this is because a lot of them come from a culture of 'activism' meaning the sharing of memes and blogs on social media, plus or minus joining some protests. But activism without critical thinking is dangerous. The point is, it's high time SJWs start thinking critically. For example: why would a worldview that divides people into two opposing groups and pits them against each other be good for social justice at all? Wouldn't that just create a divided and hyper-polarized society? Doesn't pitting people against each other on the basis of race effectively encourage white people to join alt-right and white nationalist movements? Don't men also have a mother, and women also have a father? Don't most gay people come from straight families? Why does this 'dialectical' division even make sense at all?

Note that neo-Marxist ideas often don't present themselves as clearly neo-Marxist. Sometimes, they aren't described using the usual Marxist jargon. But ideas should be judged by their essential character and effect, rather than the language they are delivered in. SJWs need to be smart enough to recognise neo-Marxist thinking patterns. If it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck, then I'm afraid it's a duck after all.

Very soon, the SJW movement will face an inevitable choice. We hope they choose liberty.

Right now, the majority of SJWs continue to listen to both liberal advice and neo-Marxist advice, and continue to sort of side with both groups simultaneously. However, these days are coming to an end. Liberals and neo-Marxists are increasingly at odds with each other. Liberal complaints about neo-Marxists methods, goals and worldviews are increasing by the day, and serious attempts at re-establishing the sanctity of free speech and the free market of ideas are well under way. On the other hand, neo-Marxists are increasingly looking towards rebuilding a 1970s-style mass movement of interconnected struggles and strikes, with memes like 'shut up liberal' and 'communism will win' as their background music. SJWs will have to choose to go with either camp, very soon.

I sincerely hope that SJWs will choose the liberal way. Of course, I would say that as a liberal, right? But if SJWs truly understand where their values come from, they would choose the camp of liberty, equality and fraternity. After all, feminism came from liberalism, and early feminists were liberals. LGBT rights and marriage equality were first supported by liberals, back when conservatives and socialists alike were staunchly homophobic. It was no accident that liberals, who always insist on the equal dignity and moral standing of every individual, were the first to embrace these causes. While conservatives were dogmatically clinging to every bit of tradition, and while Marxists were looking for their grand narrative of historical materialism to manifest itself in the West, liberals preferred to look at the experience of society on an individual by individual level.

SJWs are passionate and morality-orientated people at heart. That is why many traditional justifications of liberalism have not appealed to them. For SJWs, the utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill doesn't care enough about minorities, Adam Smith's case for free

market capitalism sounds too materialistic, and the classical libertarianism of Murray Rothbard focuses too much on dead objects (i.e. private property) and too little on living people. On the other hand, the Moral Libertarian principle of Equal Moral Agency (EMA) should be more attractive to these people, since it talks about the moral righteousness of liberal values, rather than just practical justifications.